

The First Things of Christianity

Stated in the form of Question
and Answer

By
Professor R. E. Welsh, M.A., D.D.



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NOTE.

This booklet, one must explain, sprang out of a request from a Church Committee for a summary of the vital elements of the Christian religion, to be translated into certain languages spoken by peoples within our reach. It has grown beyond the original scale contemplated; and some of my responsible advisers think that it may serve a useful purpose in general circulation.

It is, of course, not intended as a regular Church Catechism, although the original form of question and answer is retained. It is a short statement of "The First Things of Christianity" in plain and familiar language, with little use of technical terms and no attempt to give full and exact definitions. In a few places some use has been made of material in other documents. Its aim is to extend the knowledge of God and the Christian message, and perhaps in some cases to serve as a basis of instruction.

R. E. WELSH.

Montreal, May, 1920.

The First Things of Christianity

I. GOD: THE FATHER.

1. What is Religion?

Religion is the worship and service of the Power in whose favour and help men seek and find their well-being.

2. Who is God?

God is the one Supreme Being, the Creator, Source, Sustainer and Lord of all.

3. How are we to think of God?

We are to think of God as the Eternal and Personal Spirit, perfect in power, wisdom, justice, holiness and love, revealed to us as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

4. What signs have we of the being and action of God?

God shows Himself in the order and beauty of nature, in the conscience of man, in the course of history, and especially in Jesus Christ.

5. What is God to us?

God is our heavenly Father, who cares for all that He has made, and in love seeks to save and bless us us here and here after.

6. What need have we of God?

We need God because He is the source of all goodness and truth, and because we are frail, subject to trouble and death, sinful and made weak by sin.

7. Why should we love and serve God?

Because we owe everything to Him, and because He first loved us.

II. THE SON: JESUS CHRIST.

8. Who is Jesus Christ?

Jesus Christ as the Son of God is the true manifestation of what God is, and as the Son of Man is the perfect ideal of what men ought to be and to do.

9. What did Jesus Christ come to do?

Christ came to enlighten and save men, to reconcile them to the Father, to convey the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and to establish the reign of God in the world.

10. How did Christ do this?

By making known to men the holy and loving character of God the Father, by sharing their frailties and sufferings as the friend of sinners, by teaching the truths of the Kingdom of God, and by dying for mankind.

11. What does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for us?

Christ's resurrection assures us that He accomplished the work of redemption, and that every life linked with Him overcomes sin and death and rises to be with God

12. What does the ascension of Christ mean for us?

His ascension means that He was received by the Father in glory, where He continues His work of intercession in men's behalf, while ever present with us in spirit.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT.

13. Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is God working in the souls of men, and the abiding presence of Jesus Christ in the experience of His people.

14. What is the general work of the Spirit in men?

The Spirit makes men truly aware of sin, righteousness and judgment, and bears witness to Christ, bringing home to men's hearts and minds what He did, taught and signifies, so persuading and enabling them to receive the Gospel.

15. What is the special work of the Spirit in Christian disciples.

The Spirit guides them into truth, brings them strength, comfort and joy, and enables them to grow in wisdom and holiness.

IV. MAN AND SIN.

16. *What is man?*

Man is a rational and moral being, created and called to be the child of God.

17. *What value has God put upon man?*

God made man to have dominion over the works of His hand, and, as Christ died for every man, every one is of infinite value to God the Father.

18. *Is man morally free?*

Man, though weak, is free to choose the ends for which he shall live, to do or disobey the will of God, and is responsible for the same.

19. *What does Conscience do?*

Conscience shews the sense of right and wrong written in the heart, approves or condemns according as a man is true or false to the light within, the voice of God, or the standard of duty.

20. *What is the sum of God's law for man?*

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart—and thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt. xxii. 37-39.)

21. *What is sin, and wherein does it lie?*

Sin is doing wrong when we know what is right, is failure to do and to be what God requires of us, and in general is selfishness and lawlessness; and it lies in any desire, or thought, as well as in any word or deed, contrary to the good will of God.

22. *What are the effects of sin?*

Sin separates us from God, wounds His love, incurs His just displeasure, corrupts our nature, and injures our neighbours and our children after us.

23. *How are the effects of sin shewn?*

They are shewn in shame, misery, degradation and loss of inward power, and will be fully disclosed in the day of judgment.

24. *What purpose are the effects of sin meant to serve?*

They are meant to correct and teach us to do better, and to warn others against like wrong-doing.

25. Whence does temptation come?

Temptation often comes to us from outside, but it gains power only when it finds in us some weakness or evil disposition ready to answer it.

26. Is there any excuse for sin as natural or necessary?

No, since it is contrary to our better nature, and can be overcome by God's help in answer to prayer, and by turning away from evil things to wholesome interests and helpful company.

V. SALVATION.

27. What is salvation?

Salvation is new life in friendship with God and new strength in the joy of forgiveness, overcoming sin and self in endeavours after goodness and the welfare of men.

28. Are men able to save themselves?

Men, weak of will, darkened in understanding and prone to evil, are unable to make amends for their offences or to overcome their sins without the saving help which God offers to all.

29. What is the attitude of God towards sinful people?

God, who in His holiness abhors sin, is merciful and forgiving, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (Psa. lxxxvi. 5; II Peter iii. 9).

30. What must we do in order to be saved?

We must repent of our sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, learning by the help of God's Spirit to live a godly life in comradeship with men.

31. What is it to repent?

To repent is to acknowledge our sins with shame, to sorrow over the wrong we have done to God and men, and to turn in heart away from sin, with sincere intention to do better by God's help.

32. *What is meant by believing on Jesus Christ?*

To believe on Jesus Christ is to learn of Him as Teacher, to rely on Him as Saviour through the love of God, and to follow Him as the Guide of life.

33. *How are we enabled to repent and believe?*

By seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts, by reading the word of God in Holy Scripture, by hearing the Gospel preached, and by learning the lessons of experience.

34. *What are the benefits of salvation?*

The chief benefits of salvation are forgiveness of our sins, fellowship with God, union with Christ and our brethren, the renewal of our hearts, power for a higher life and for the service of men, the assurance of victory over death, and a place in the heavenly kingdom.

VI. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

35. *What is it to be a Christian?*

To be a Christian is to have faith in God as Christ made Him known, to put our trust in Christ as Saviour and be loyal to Him as Lord, to live and serve in the spirit of His life and service.

36. *Why should every one be a Christian?*

Because the Christian life is the best kind of life, because Christ by His grace helps us to live that life, and because we can best meet the needs of others in the Christian way and comradeship.

37. *What does a man lose and gain by being a Christian?*

A Christian gives up things, pleasant for a time, which bring no lasting satisfaction, and gains those better things which bring him true happiness and personal power as well as good to others.

38. *What is the Christian's chief aim?*

His chief aim is to be a true son of God in goodness and in loving service of his fellowmen, and so to glorify God and advance His reign in the world.

39. *What are the special qualities of the Christian character?*

They are peace and joy, humility before God, modesty before men, meekness in the face of pride, forbearance under wrong, patience under trial, peaceableness, readiness to forgive, and endurance in withstanding evil.

40. *What is the main thing in all goodness?*

The main thing is love and goodwill, which delights to please God and unselfishly to seek the good of others, and so meets all the requirements of God's law.

41. *What attitude should we shew to those from whom we have suffered wrong?*

We should put away all revenge, and in love try to do them good and bring them to a better mind and way of life, overcoming evil with good.

42. *What does God require of man?*

"To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God," according to the Ten Commandments (Micah vi. 8).

43. *What are our duties in humble piety toward God, according to the Ten Commandments.* (See page 19.)

Our duties to God are: (I) to honour and serve the one living God alone; (II) to worship Him in spirit and in truth; (III) to think worthy thoughts of Him, to use His name with reverence, and avoid profanity of speech in blasphemy and swearing; and (IV) with diligence in daily work to hallow one day in the week for rest and worship.

44. *What are our duties to our parents?*

(V) To respect, love and obey them as under duty to God, and to care for them in case of need.

45. *What are our duties to our fellowmen, according to the same law?*

(VI) To respect their lives and persons as sacred, hurting none; (VII) to protect their homes, keeping marriage sacred and ourselves chaste in speech, behaviour and thought; (VIII) to deal honestly with our neighbours, taking no unbrotherly advantage of them; (IX) to spread no false report hurtful to their

good name, bearing no false evidence; and (X) to be glad in others' happiness and prosperity, not desiring to have at their loss what they possess.

46. *What does justice require?*

Justice requires that we respect the rights and the needs of others, that we help them to become all they are capable of being, and that we strive to see fair play done.

47. *What is the law of truthfulness?*

The law of truthfulness is that we shall not by word, pretence or silence mislead or deceive our fellowmen to their hurt, but shall speak the truth in honour, sincerity and love every man to his neighbour.

48. *What is wrong in gambling?*

Gambling, in any game of chance, is a reckless speculation, and is wrong in that it makes personal gain at others' loss and without any due return in service rendered.

49. *How are we to show mercy?*

We are to take compassion on all who suffer under hardship or sin by brotherly acts of love, by readiness to forgive as we hope to be forgiven, and by kindness to all living creatures, remembering our Lord's words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. xxv. 40).

50. *What is Christ's Golden Rule of Life?*

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. vii. 12).

VII. COMMON PRAYER.

51. *What special means of grace has God provided?*

The chief outward means of grace are Prayer and Public Worship, the Word of God in the Bible, the fellowship of the Church, and the Sacraments.

52. *What is Prayer?*

Prayer is speaking with God that He may speak with us and dispose us to His will, is the uplifting of our hearts to Him in the utterance of godly desire, in confession of sin, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving for His mercies.

53. What pattern of prayer did Jesus give to His disciples?

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven; give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen." (Matt. vi, 9-13).

54. Does God hear and answer prayer?

God answers prayer offered in faith for things agreeable to His will, for our own good and for the good of others.

55. To whom should we pray?

We should pray to God only: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

56. For whom should we pray?

For ourselves as we need God's blessing, for all in need, for all men, even our enemies, for our country and all nations, for all in authority, and for the whole Church.

57. When and where should we pray?

We should pray constantly, in secret, in our family circle, and in the assemblies of worshipping people.

58. Why should we assemble regularly to worship God?

Because we need fellowship with God and one another; He calls us to meet together for worship and mutual help; and Christ promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them.

THE LORD'S DAY.

59. What day of the week has been set apart as holy?

The first day of the week, the Lord's Day, often called the Christian Sabbath, is to be hallowed, in keeping with God's law that one day in seven is to be set apart as holy.

60. *What reason have we for keeping that day holy?*

It was the day of our Lord's resurrection, and His disciples thereafter observed that day when they met to break bread in His name.

61. *What are the main uses of the Lord's Day?*

It is to be used as the day of rest from needless labour and worldly amusements, and kept for spiritual renewal, works of mercy and Christian service.

62. *What are the public benefits of the observance of the Lord's Day?*

It is to be observed for its social and national benefits, in refreshing both body and mind after the week's labour, in renewing family ties, in raising men's thoughts above worldly interests and cares, and in binding citizens together in common aims and ideals.

VIII. THE BIBLE.

63. *Where is the chief message of God to be found?*

It is contained within the Old and New Testaments which form the Holy Bible.

64. *What claim has the Bible to our reverent regard?*

It records the revelation of God which He made through devout men, prophets and apostles, who were moved by God to declare His purpose for men and the rule of faith and duty, and especially through His Son Jesus Christ.

65. *What is the main purpose of the Old Testament?*

To show that there is one living, holy and gracious God who governs the world in righteousness, and that He was preparing the way for the coming of His kingdom and a redeemer of men.

66. *What is the purpose of the New Testament?*

To tell men about the person, life and teaching of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God, the way of salvation and holiness, and the founding of the Christian Church.

67. *What events in New Testament history do Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Whitsunday, and Ascension Day commemorate?*

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ, Good Friday His death on the cross, Easter His resurrection, Whitsunday the descent of the Holy Spirit in power, and Ascension day His ascension into heaven.

IX. THE CHURCH.

68. *What is the Christian Church?*

The Church on earth is the community of all attached to Christ and to one another in a brotherhood of love and service: is the living body of Christ and the organ of the Spirit in continuing Christ's work.

69. *Who founded the Christian Church?*

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ, and extended in the world by His apostles, having Christ as its one foundation.

70. *Who is the Head of the Church?*

The only Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all may freely, directly and confidently go for help.

71. *What has the Church to do for its members?*

The Church has to provide the means of grace in public worship and the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, a spiritual home with guidance and mutual help for its members and instruction for the young.

72. *What has the Church to do in the world?*

It has to make Christ known to all men, to bear public witness to God's righteousness and love, and raise the lot and lives of all in advancing the kingdom of God.

73. *How is the Church holy?*

It is holy in that it was divinely instituted, is engaged in God's service, and its members are called to the pursuit, practice and spread of holiness.

74. *How is the Church catholic?*

It is catholic in that it is universal, open to all peoples and classes, consisting of all those throughout the world who truly believe in and follow Christ.

75. How is the Church one?

It is one in that, while different communions have different forms of government and worship, they all acknowledge one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, and all have access to the Father by the one Spirit. (Ephes. iv. 5; ii. 18).

76. What is the Communion of Saints?

It is the conscious possession of a common faith and life, common interests and fellowship in spirit among all, in all ages and spheres, who belong to the whole congregation of God's faithful people; and it teaches "in things essential unity, in things doubtful liberty, and in all things charity" (St. Augustine).

77. Why should all who believe in Christ take their place in the Church?

Because they not only need its fellowship and instruction, but also in it they become partners in the greatest agency for the lasting good of mankind.

X. THE SACRAMENTS AND THE MINISTRY.

78. What are the Sacraments of the Church?

The Christian Sacraments are Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, called also the Eucharist.

79. What is the meaning of a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is a holy rite instituted by Jesus Christ as a pledge of saving grace, to make plain by visible signs the inward benefits of the Gospel, and, when rightly used in faith, to be the means of conveying grace to the heart and confirming faith.

80. What is Christian Baptism?

Baptism, by the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, signifies the cleansing of the heart by the grace of Jesus Christ and the renewal of the soul by the Spirit, and is the seal of the sacred bond by which we are assured of God's fatherly care, and engaged to live the Christian life.

81. *What is the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion?*

The Lord's Supper is the holy feast instituted by our Lord Jesus for the perpetual remembrance of His sacrifice of Himself in His death, to be a seal of the blessings thereof to true believers who feed spiritually on Him with thanksgiving, and a bond and pledge of their union with Him and with each other as members of His body, which is the Church.

82. *What do the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper signify?*

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ shed for the remission of sins (1 Cor. x. 16; Matt. xxvi. 28).

83. *What object is this Sacrament appointed to serve?*

It is appointed to proclaim the Lord's death, to nourish and refresh the hearts of believers, to show their oneness in Him and in brotherly love, to enable them to give open confession of their faith in Him and to renew their vows of devotion to His service.

84. *What makes the Sacraments effectual?*

The Sacraments are made effectual means of grace, not from any virtue in them or in the person who administers them, but only by the blessing of God and the working of the Holy Spirit in those who receive them.

85. *Who are the Ministers of the Word and the Sacraments?*

Christian Ministers are godly men, called of God and the Church, and solemnly set apart to preach the Gospel, to teach the Word, to administer the Sacraments, and as pastors to take oversight of the flock of Christ.

XI. THE CHURCH AND THE STATE.

86. *What is the Christian's duty as a citizen?*

His duty is to support and defend his country, to respect and uphold all lawful authority, to preserve

the social order for the general good, to make individual and class interests subordinate to the common weal, and to take an active interest in public affairs.

87. What is the duty of the Church to the State?

The Church is under duty to observe public laws freely ordained, unless overriding its loyalty to Christ in things spiritual, to instruct both rulers and subjects in the principles governing their duties in civic and national life, to intercede for the people, and to imbue the nation with the spirit of Christ and lead in social improvement.

88. What is the duty of the State to the Church?

The duty of the State to the Church is to protect freedom of religious belief and practice, to assist in promoting righteousness and humanity in all public life, and to acknowledge God as the supreme authority over men.

89. Is the Church subject to the State?

The Church, which is the ally of the State in the interests of the public good and subject to civil law, is free to govern itself in all spiritual matters of belief and common order.

XII. THINGS TO COME.

90. What is Christ's promise of His coming reign?

The promise of Christ is that, in His own good time and way, He will manifest Himself before men in great power and glory, and will establish the reign of God in the world: for which we should be ready, and pray, saying, "Thy kingdom come!"

91. Does man survive death?

While the present body of man dies, his spirit lives for ever, for better or for worse, in the body for which it is meet.

92. What is the judgment to come?

All men are to give account of themselves to God in the day when all good and evil will be brought to light, and each will receive according to what he has done and been.

93. *What are our future destinies?*

Those who are found loyal to Jesus Christ enter into everlasting life at home with the Lord, and such as remain impenitent in their sins depart into shame, loss and misery in the region of death.

94. *What hope have we in dying?*

We are well assured that all who fall asleep in Jesus He will receive unto Himself, that where He is, there they may be also.

95. *What is to be the end of all things?*

The end of all is that all things are to be subject to God (1 Cor. xv. 24-8).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

I am the Lord thy God

I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

V. Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

VI. Thou shalt not kill.

VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VIII. Thou shalt not steal.

IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's. (Exodus xx. 3-17).

THE BEATITUDES.

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say : 1 manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew v. 3-12.)

